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## **Korean Higher Education under the United States Military Government: 1945-1948**

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### **Abstract**

*The purpose of this study is to examine Korean higher education under the United States Military Government (1945-1948). In order to review this study, the author uses a descriptive analysis methodology. In addition, to research the study systematically, this paper first of all outlines the historic and political context of post-World War II in Korea. Next, the author examines transformations in Korea 's higher education system under the rule of the U.S. Military Government, with a particular focus on educational systems and administration. Finally, implications for the educational administration in Korean higher education are described in terms of organizational structure and culture. This article says: as far as the U.S. Military Government 's impact on Korean higher education is concerned, the positive effects of the U.S. military presence in Korea are greater than the negative. Overall, the U.S. Military Government brought about marked improvements in contemporary Korean higher education, by introducing American educational philosophy, administration, and culture.*

### **Introduction**

The Korean people historically developed a traditional elite/higher education which conformed to the ancient Chinese educational system based on Buddhistic and Confucian studies before Western Christian missionaries introduced Western higher education to the Koreans in the late Choson Dynasty (AD 1880-1910) (Grayson, 1985; Lee, K. B., 1984; Lee, 1998; Underwood, 1926). After the annexation of Korea by Japan in 1910, Japanese colonialists limited higher education opportunities to the Korean people (Lee, K. B., 1984; Ministry of Education, 2000).

On August 15, 1945, the liberation from the Japanese colonial rule was a turning point from a colonial Japanese educational system to a democratic American system (Seth, 1998; Ministry of Education, 2000 ). In particular, the American higher education system which the United States Military Government planted in the southern part of the Korean peninsula has been a matrix of contemporary Korean higher education system and still grows in current Korean higher education. In this vein, the United States Military Government played an important role in the history of Korean higher education. Thus,

the examination of higher education in Korea under the United States Military Government (1945-1948) can give a significant meaning to the educators of both countries in terms of educational administration.

In consideration of this significance, the purpose of this study is to examine Korean higher education under the United States Military Government (1945-1948). In order to review the study, the author will use a descriptive analysis methodology (Klaus, 1980). In addition, to research the study systematically, this paper will first of all outline the historic and political context of post-World War II in Korea. Secondly, the author will examine transformations in Korea's higher education system under the rule of the U.S. Military Government, with a particular focus on educational systems and administration. Finally, implications for the educational administration in Korean higher education will be described in terms of organizational structure and culture.

## **Historic and Political Overviews**

After the defeat of Japan on August 15, 1945, the military forces of the United States landed on the Korean peninsula with their own ideology, Americanism. Americanism in this paper is regarded as the economic, political, and military power dominated the Korean people under the U.S. Military Government from 1945 to 1948.

On September 7, 1945, the Commander in Chief of the Pacific United States Army Forces, General Douglas MacArthur, announced his General Order Number 1:

By virtue of the authority vested in me as Commander in Chief, United States Army Forces, Pacific, I hereby establish military control over Korea south of 38 degrees north latitude and the inhabitants thereof, and announce the following conditions of the occupation:

All powers of government over the territory of Korea south of 38 degrees north latitude and the people thereof will be for the present exercised under my authority. Persons will obey my orders and orders issued under my authority. Acts of resistance to the occupying forces or any acts which may disturb public peace and safety will be punished severely. For all purposes during the military control, English will be official language.... (Simons, 1995, p. 159)

As Geoff Simons (1995) indicates, Order Number 1 did not comment on the Cairo pledge to make Korea free and independent 'in due course' (p. 159). After three years of Korean occupation, however, the U.S. Government kept its promise of the 1943 Cairo Conference, transferring the reigns of government to the new South Korean Government. On October 17, 1945, the American commander of the U.S. troops in Korea, Lieutenant-General John R. Hodge, also proclaimed: "The Military Government Office is the sole government of Korea. If there is any person who complains of the orders or deliberately slanders the Military Government, he shall suffer punishment" (Simons, 1995, p. 160).

In the late 1945 and the early 1946, like Japanese colonial imperialists, the American military authorities politically oppressed a number of Koreans who desired independence from foreign powers (Meade, 1951, pp. 58-62; Simons, 1995, pp. 159-162). The Korean intellectuals and nationalists were split between the right and the left wings by ideologies, namely democratism and communism. In fact, the U.S. Military Government maintained the governing structure of the Japanese Government-General of Choson (Meade, 1951, p. 59; Oliver, 1993, pp. 169-70) and employed the Koreans of whom many were 'well-known pro-Japanese collaborators' in the administration of its own affairs (Meade, 1951, p. 61; Simons, 1995, p. 160). For this reason, a number of Korean nationalists turned their back on Americanism under the military government.

Historically, however, the Korean people or country was always at the last line or object in American foreign policy in the Far East (McCune, 1982; Oliver, 1993). As Shannon McCune (1982) indicates, historically, "American ignorance of Korea was reflected in the tentative and cautious actions taken by the United States Government" (p. 156). As a historical fact, the Korean-American Treaty of 1882 notes:

If other powers deal unjustly or oppressively with either government, the other will exert their good offices, and being informed of the case, to bring about an amicable arrangement, thus showing their friendly feeling. (Chay, 1982, p. 28)

On the other hand, Nahm (1982) cites, "[t]he Taft-Katsura Memorandum of conversation of July 27, 1905, has been widely interpreted as a secret pact between the United States and Japan whereby the United States approved Japanese seizure of Korea and establishment of their suzerainty over Korea in return for a Japanese disavowal of any aggressive intentions toward the Philippines" (p. 38).

In consideration of the above historic facts, the U.S. Government showed two-faced American policy to the Korean people. As John Chay (1982) and Andrew C. Nahm (1982) point out, the United States policy toward Korea during the late Choson period was pro-Japanese. Such an unfair foreign policy affected the MacArthur Military Administration during the late 1940s in the Far East. Under the MacArthur Administration, American policy, interest, and supplies went first of all, and most of all, to Japan, whereas Korea remained at the very last (Oliver, 1993, p. 175). In particular, General MacArthur did not punish Japanese Emperor, Hirohito, as a top war criminal, but showed special courtesy toward him and his royal family except limiting freedom and financial resources. The author believes that discriminating foreign policy of the United States and American ignorance of Korea were two main factors that fell the Hodge Military Administration in Korea into the politically difficult situation. Robert T. Oliver (1993) cites:

General John R. Hodge, unexpectedly propelled into commanding the military government of the south, nervously cabled the Pentagon: "Under the existing situation and policies the U.S. occupation of Korea faces no success and is being pushed both politically and economically into a state of absurdly great difficulty." (p. 169)

In addition, as Robert T. Oliver (1993) points out, several reasons are to be added as follows: (1) basically, the U.S. Government did no sufficient preparation for rebuilding of Korea; (2) the U.S. Governmental decision regarding personnel to be used was inappropriate and unwise; (3) the U.S. Military Government had no clear policy for handling with communists, who were fundamentally disruptive factors in South Korea; (4) both the Koreans and the Americans were almost ignorant about each people and culture; (5) the Korean people generally dislike an imposed foreign government and resist it by all available means; (6) the U.S. Military Government in Korea did not effectively control communist and populist cells that were widespread all through the country; (7) the U.S. Military Government did not like so much the mass of the Koreans as pro-Japanese collaborators who were “successful” economically or educationally; finally, (8) there was jealously deep-seated resentment over the far greater speed and thoroughness of the rehabilitation of Japan under the MacArthur Military Administration (pp. 170-175).

Synthesizing the historic and political situations under the U.S. Military Government in Korea, the author’s opinion is on the whole the same as Oliver’s (1993). Although the U.S. Military Government tried to plant American democracy in the heterogeneous cultural soil, the political, social, and economic conditions of Korea were beyond control of the government. In the modern Korean history, the U.S. Military Government left a stain distorting the national orthodoxy owing to the patronage of pro-Japanese collaborators. The authority of General MacArthur was a top organ of the U.S. Military Government in the Far East. The State Department was required to deal with Korea through the MacArthur Administration (Meade, 1951, p. 76).

## **Transformations in Korean Higher Education System under the Rule of the U.S. Military Government**

Unlike political situations, the U.S. military authorities viewed education as a seed or a sapling to plant American democracy. In the first year of Korean occupation, as the administrative organization of the Government-General of Choson under the Japanese colonial regime, the American military governor was a top administrator, who headed the Secretariat, and by the directors of the Bureaus of Finance, Public Safety, Mining and Industry, Agriculture and Commerce, Public Health, Education, Justice, and Communication and Transportation (Meade, 1951, pp. 76-77). Within a year’s time (1945-1946), “the Americans had created a centralized governmental structure considerably more complex than anything the people had experienced during their forty years under the Japanese” (Meade, 1951, p. 77).

The United States Military Government began to reopen the educational system held in abeyance. On September 29, the U.S. Military Government in Korea (USAMGIK) announced Ordinance No. 6 regarding the reopening of all previously existing educational institutions. After reopening all schools, the military government worked through the administrative structure left by the Japanese to make a new educational structure and system. Accordingly, on October 21, 1945 the military administration

issued a directive as the following:

The general policy of the Military Government on the schools of Korea south of 38 degree N. is to operate the schools within the existing frame work until such time as it seems wise to make changes. Since the existing system is highly centralized, when changes are made they must be made throughout the entire system. Until changes are directed by the Military Government, Military Government officers operate according to existing system. (USAMGIK Official Gazette, October 2, 1945, p. 7)

In order to accomplish the stated policy and to establish the overall educational work, the military authorities made a 'National Committee on Educational Planning (NCEP)' composed of 80 Korean educators and public leaders as well as 10 U.S. military officers in November 1945 (Adams, 1965, p. 4). The responsibility of the committee was to set up new educational systems and philosophies as well as to erase the remnants of Japanese colonial education. In March 1946, the committee adopted the new educational framework based on the spirit of Korean nationalism as well as the principles and systems of American education. For example, the committee adopted (1) a 6-6-4 organizational ladder, which is similar to the American educational system, (2) co-education regardless of social status and gender, and (3) American pragmatic philosophy of education as the model of Korean education. In addition, the committee adopted "Hongik Ingan"(maximum benefit for human beings), which is the legendary national philosophy of the nation's founder Dangun, as the basic philosophy of Korean education (Yoo, 1983; Yu 1992).

In terms of Korean higher education, the significant achievement of the committee was its reorganization and expansion of higher education (Adams, 1965, p. 5). Frank L. Eversull (1947), who had been working as the Chief of Colleges and Teachers Colleges, USAMGIK, at that time, described the situation of higher education as follows:

During the first year of occupation there were many conferences, plans, and discussions about the nature and the direction of higher education in Korea. In Seoul there were nine or ten public colleges and sixteen private colleges, which had been placed under strict supervision by the Japanese during their occupation. In addition, there were normal colleges (and two additional medical colleges) in the several provinces as well as a College of Fisheries in Fusan. (p. 52)

Just before the liberation of Korea in August 1945, according to the assertions of Lee (1989) and Nam (1962), there were 19 higher education institutions and a little over 3,000 students. There are some different views: Eversull (1947) and Adams (1965) assert more than 25 institutions, while Yu (1992) notes 21 schools (p. 309), and the Ministry of Education (1976) notes 7,819 students and 19 schools in 1945. In November 1947, however, the number of higher education institutions reached 29 with more than twenty thousand students, with the expansion of national and private tertiary institutions (Lee, 1989, p. 101).

Two of the most significant steps in the reorganization and expansion of higher education

were the establishment of national and private universities and colleges. Under the Bureau of Education, it had a director, an assistant director, and four chiefs: Chief of Colleges, Chief of Teacher's Colleges, Chief of Middle Schools, and Chief of Primary Schools (Eversull, 1947, p. 51). On March 29, 1946, the Bureau of Education was renamed as the Ministry of Education (Yu, 1992, p. 289). Additionally, under the U.S. Military Government, the organizational structure of the Bureau of Education was changed many times and increased its structure.

Before a new educational plan was initiated, the U.S. Military Government in Korea proclaimed Ordinance 6 concerning the reopening of all previously existing educational institutions on September 29, 1945. After approximately two months, as briefly mentioned in the previous page, the U.S. Military Government organized the National Committee on Educational Planning (Adams, 1965, p. 4). The first meeting was held on November 23, 1945 (Yu, 1992, p. 290). Yu (1992) noted that the National Committee on Education Planning was composed of 100 members of educational and social leaders (p. 290). In addition, Sung-hwa Lee (1958) wrote that the Committee consisted of 81 members divided into 12 subcommittees, and that ten of its members were American military officers (p. 154). In March 1946, the committee set up a new educational framework based on Korean nationalism and American democratism.

In point of Korean higher education, as a fruit of endeavor of the National Committee on Educational Planning, the U.S. military governor adopted Ordinance 102 on August 22, 1946, which provided for the establishment of Seoul National University (formerly Keijo Imperial University), with its 11 constituent colleges and a graduate school (Adams, 1964, p. 5; Eversull, 1947, p. 52). Seoul National University constituted: College of Agriculture and Forestry at Suwon, College of Commerce, College of Dentistry, College of Education, College of Engineering, College of Fine Arts, College of Law, College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, College of Medicine, including School of Nursing and Nursing Education, and a Graduate School (Eversull, 1947, p. 52).

In the history of Korea, since the highest national institutions had been monopolized by the aristocratic or privileged people, the establishment of Seoul National University left a great educational achievement that made it possible for the populace to be equally admitted to the national university through fair entrance examinations.

Section I of the Ordinance 102 says:

Purpose. The purpose of this ordinance is to provide for and make available to the people of Korea improved facilities for higher education, so that the youth of Korea may take advantages of the benefits and opportunities accruing therefrom, for the betterment of themselves as individuals and the Korean people as a nation in modern society.

(Eversull, 1947, p. 52)

Under the influence of the above Ordinance, between 1946 and 1948, over 30 other national, public, and private tertiary institutes, including mission-supported and native-founded institutions, received government recognition (Adams, 1965, p. 5).

In spite of the increase of tertiary institutions, it was not easy for the military authorities to plant American democratic and scientific ideas, administration, organizational systems, curricula, etc. in higher education because of the deep-rooted Confucian traditions and the Japanese colonial remnants. For instance, the method of admission was done by entrance examinations based on the Kwa-keo (the national civil service examinations) system. In addition, teaching styles of faculty members still maintained a way of monologic communication which was founded upon a Confucian instructional style, namely kang-kyung (reading). Furthermore, after the Liberation in 1945, Korean educational administrators still assumed autocratic attitudes related to either Confucian or Japanese Shinto-Confucian authoritarianism (KNCU, 1960, pp. 117-118; Wood, 1961, p. 385).

### **Implications for the Educational Administration in Contemporary Korean Higher Education**

In terms of educational administration in Korean higher education, although the U.S. Military Government adopted the centralized Japanese system (Meade, 1951, p. 76), administrative personnel of the Bureau of Education or the Department of Education attempted to adopt the decentralized and participative system under the entrepreneurial structure which typically constituted a top manager and some workers in the operative core. The National Committee on Educational Planning was a good example of the entrepreneurial structure. Unlike the highly centralized Japanese organizational structure accompanied by legitimate and coercive power, the U.S. military educational administrators used a reciprocal form of technological interdependence with democratic leadership in order to plan new educational systems and ideas for the Korean people. The form is the highest level of interdependence that requires mutual adjustment and cooperative work.

Accordingly, the U. S. soldier educators preferred an open rational system to a closed formal system. Under such a system, they sowed a democratic seed that came out Christianity and American culture in the Japanese Shinto-Confucian soil. Under American military rule, organizational culture in Korean higher education was budding in American democratic ideology, egalitarian Christian norms, and liberal values. In addition, American utilitarianism, Protestantism, and pragmatism were important factors composed of organizational culture in Korean higher education. Christianity and Western thought played important roles not only in the reestablishment of Korean higher education, but in the enhancement of the spiritual world of the Korean people. With the traditional Confucian ethical concept which placed emphasis on morally social harmony in human relations through moral training (Lee, 2001; Lee, 2002a), Christianity and Western thought have become main factors that dominate organizational culture in contemporary Korean society and higher education (Lee, 2002a; Lee, 2002b).

During the three years of the U.S. military reign, American soldier educators contributed (1) to eradicate the remnants of Japanese colonial education, (2) to plant the seed of

American democratic education in school systems, administration, and curriculum and instruction, (3) to train Koreans with Western practical knowledge and scientific skills, (4) to practice “Koreanize” education for the Korean people, appointing many Korean intellectuals who participated in a new educational plan under the U.S. Military Government guide and assistance, (5) to give opportunities to learn American ideas and culture directly or indirectly from the American people or in Christian churches, colleges, and universities, (6) to increase many tertiary students and institutes, and (7) to give the Korean people equal opportunities to enter colleges and universities.

In spite of these positive effects, the author cannot but point out negative ones. The U.S. Military Government did not do sufficient preplanning for educational reformation, and many American educational administrators did not understand the Korean people and culture well (Meade, 1951; Lee, 1989). Also, the military government did not sweep out the remains of Japanese colonial education because of the Koreans who had a pro-Japanese tendency. In particular, individualism and mammonism based on Western values and capitalism threaten the traditional Korean values and norms -- such as collectivism, individual virtue, filial piety, and sincerity -- based on Confucianism (Lee, N. P., 1994; Lee, 2002a). With a rapidly economic development of Korea, traditional Korean values have gradually diminished, whereas Western values have increased in contemporary Korean society and education (Lee, N. P., 1994; Lee, 2002b).

In spite of this negative side, as far as the U.S. Military Government’s impact on Korean education is concerned, the positive effects of the U.S. military presence in Korea were greater than the negative. In addition, the military government used education as a major means for democratization and Americanization of the Korean people (McGinn et al., 1980; Kim, 1989).

Conclusively, the Korean people traditionally clamor for education and have great emphasis on education based on Confucian values, as Vieman (1951) points out in her book, *Korean Adventure*. The U.S. Military Government activated Koreans’ educational enthusiasm, and virtually planted the seeds of democratic and pragmatic higher education in the Korean peninsula. In 1948, over 30 national, public, and private institutions of higher education were up and going in South Korea. Overall, the U.S. Military Government brought about marked improvements in contemporary Korean higher education, by introducing American educational philosophy, administration, and culture.



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## **End Notes**

This article largely depended on the author's unpublished Ph.D. dissertation (The University of Texas at Austin, 1997) and the author's book, *Historic Factors Influencing Korean Higher Education* (2000) published in Jimoondang International, and was partly revised and extended.

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